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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper, one of three related documents, is to present hypotheses about the causes for the success of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The fund's success is demonstrated by the following achievements, all discussed indepth: diversity among the fund's applicants and grantees, multidimensional projects, effects beyond the host institution, and continuation and institutionalization after the Fund's support ended. The paper's final section discusses hypotheses about the fund's overall success as a federal agency. (Author/LD)

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**Hypotheses About the Successes of the
Fund for the Improvement of
Postsecondary Education**

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HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE SUCCESSES OF THE FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Introduction

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (hereafter referred to as the Fund) is a small grant-awarding Federal agency established by Congress in 1972. The Fund attempts to promote improvements in postsecondary education by providing small seed-money grants to projects located at a wide variety of institutions and organizations. Since October 1978, NTS Research Corporation has been conducting an evaluation of the Fund for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW). The Fund's evaluation is presently scheduled to be completed in September, 1980. Although there are still major tasks to be completed,¹ the work that is already done indicates that the Fund is an extremely successful Federal agency. To those familiar with evaluations of Federal educational programs and agencies, this finding may be surprising; Federal educational programs are not often judged to be successful.² However, the evaluation's current results demonstrate that when judged by any of a number of criteria, the Fund should be considered a success (Pelavin, S. et al., 1979).

The purpose of this paper is to present hypotheses about the causes of the Fund's success at fostering change within the field of postsecondary education. The Fund's success is demonstrated by its achievements, many of which have already

¹For example, NTS is currently attempting to obtain further information regarding the Fund's impact on the field of postsecondary education by interviewing approximately 1000 members of institutions or organizations associated with postsecondary education.

²For example, see Berman, P. and McLaughlin, M. Federal Programs Supporting Change, Volumes IV, VII and VIII. Santa Monica, CA.: The Rand Corporation, 1975, 1977 and 1978.

been well documented.³ Foremost among these achievements are:

- Great diversity among the Fund's applicants and grantees;
- Projects with multiple purposes and impacts;
- Projects which substantially affect not only their host institution but other members of the field of postsecondary education;
- Project activities which have continued and become institutionalized after the Fund's support ended.

The following four sections of this paper explore causes of the Fund's success by hypothesizing about the causes of specific achievements. The paper's final section will discuss hypotheses about the Fund's overall success as a Federal agency.

Diversity among the Fund's Applicants and Grantees

There is substantial diversity among the Fund's applicants and grantees in terms of institutional type, geographical location, and project focus. Applicants and grantees are from private and public colleges and universities, community-based organizations, professional or educational associations, museums, libraries and numerous other types of organizations associated with postsecondary education. The host institutions and organizations are located in every section of the country, somewhat matching the geographical distribution of institutes of higher education. We hypothesize that the following characteristics of the Fund are the underlying causes of this diversity:

³ See Pelavin, S., et al., An Evaluation of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, Volume 2: Applicants and Grantees. Durham, N.C.: NTS Research Corporation, 1980; Hayward, B.J., Johnston, D. and Pelavin, D., "An Analysis of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education's Comprehensive Grant Program," NTS Paper Series, Durham, N.C.: NTS Research Corporation, 1980; and Pelavin, D., Johnston, D., and Shefter, J., "An Analysis of the Achievements and Impacts of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education's Projects," NTS Paper Series, Durham, N.C.: NTS Research Corporation, 1980.

- The Fund is responsive to the ideas of practitioners and other members of the field of postsecondary education.
- The Fund supports a comprehensive rather than a categorical grant program.
- The Fund takes risks.

Responsiveness to Ideas from the Field

The Fund does not believe that any group of researchers or experts in postsecondary education, including itself, can best determine how to improve postsecondary education. Rather, the Fund believes that practitioners and other members of the field of postsecondary education should be the primary source of knowledge about all innovations and improvements. Therefore, the Fund encourages its applicants to identify and analyze problems that need to be addressed and to develop and propose solutions to these problems. Thus the Fund projects represent ideas generated by members of the field in response to local needs.

Comprehensive Grants

The Fund's grant competition is comprehensive rather than categorical. The competition's guidelines do not limit the areas of postsecondary education that grant proposals may address. Rather the guidelines suggest that proposals should represent local priorities and concerns.

Risks

The Fund considers itself a "risk-taking" agency. Their guidelines state that they will "entertain proposals for new and unproven ideas as well as proven ones" (Program Information and Application Procedures, 1979). Thus the Fund hopes to avoid discouraging potential applicants and seeks to encourage innovative methods of improvement. If a proposal's ideas seem to represent an

improvement, it will not be rejected simply because its approach is untried or not based upon existing practices.

Summary

All the characteristics of the Fund that have just been discussed encourage local initiative and participation. Their overall thrust is to encourage proposals from all facets of the field of postsecondary education; no one is discouraged from applying, regardless of their type of institution or the problem or need that is being addressed. New and innovative approaches to problems are encouraged. Substantial diversity among applicants and grants seems a natural result of this broad-based encouragement.

Multidimensional Projects

The Fund's projects do not each have a single purpose, nor can they be simply classified according to their type of impact. Rather, the majority of projects have multiple purposes and diverse impacts. This "multidimensionality" substantially enhances the value of each project and may be a key to why the Fund's projects are successful.

Multidimensionality

Most educational problems are complex; projects that address several facets of a problem should have a greater chance at succeeding than projects that address only one facet. For example, the problem of providing a beneficial education to nontraditional students cannot merely be viewed as a problem of access. Frequently, improved instructional methods and support services are necessary for a project to successfully encourage and maintain the educational development of nontraditional students. For example, one of the Fund's projects, the Field-Based Social Science Program for Adult Workers (Hempstead, New York), was successful because it provided

not only educational access to nontraditional students, but also an individualized education that purposefully integrated their specific experience and career interests, support services to help them cope with the additional psychological, economic and time pressures incurred by being students, and education in a non-alienating setting.

Proposal Review

We hypothesize that the Fund's unusual review process causes the selection of such "multidimensional" projects. The Fund has developed a two-stage process for reviewing grant proposals. The first stage or "preliminary" proposal typically is short (approximately five pages) and includes a brief definition of the problem to be addressed and a description of the project's activities and anticipated outcomes. Preliminary proposals are initially reviewed by readers from the field of postsecondary education. Since the number of preliminary proposals that must be reviewed is large (ranging from 1500 to 2000), the number of readers who participate in the initial review is also large (approximately 150). Groups of reviewers are annually convened in four to five locations across the country. Proposals are ranked according to several criteria; rankings together with readers' comments and the proposals themselves are next reviewed by small committees composed of members of the Fund's staff. The Fund then requests that a small group of applicants (about 350) submit an enlarged and more detailed second-stage or "full" proposal.

Full proposals are initially reviewed by a select panel of three readers: one reader from the general field of postsecondary education, one from the specific area of postsecondary education addressed by the proposal, and one from the Fund's staff. The full proposals together with the panels' comments are then reviewed by the Fund's staff. If there is strong disagreement about the proposal's merits, an additional review may be conducted by a staff committee. Otherwise, either a final decision is reached or the full proposal is submitted

to the Fund's Board of Advisors for their review. The Board most frequently reviews proposals requesting large amounts of support or those that might be considered controversial or unusually significant. After the Board submits its recommendations to the Fund, final decisions are made. Thus, each proposal the Fund receives is reviewed meticulously and only those applicants whose merit is most clearly demonstrated are awarded grants.

Summary

Most of the problems addressed by the Fund's projects are complex. We hypothesize that projects which have the highest probability of success are those which are "multidimensional," or focus on more than one aspect of a problem. We further hypothesize that the Fund's detailed review process causes the selection of projects with an extremely high probability of success. Therefore, multidimensional projects, because of their prospects for success, are selected more often than others.

Effects Beyond the Host Institution

There have been a large number of attempts at adaptation or replication of the Fund's projects' activities.⁴ Thus, the Fund's projects substantially affect not only their host institution or organization but other members of the field of postsecondary education. We hypothesize that dissemination of information about project operations and accomplishments has caused the large number of attempts at project adaptation or replication.

The Fund encourages dissemination activities during the early stages of their projects. In fact, the Fund frequently requests that plans for dissimination

⁴The number of adaptations or replications was initially estimated at approximately 14,000 in Pelavin, S., et al., An Evaluation of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Volume 1. Durham, N.C.: NTS Research Corporation, 1980. Based on the results of current research, this estimate is now being revised. However, we believe even the revised estimate will be quite large, perhaps as high as 7,000.

tion activities be included in a project's proposal. The Fund's projects have responded to this encouragement; eighty-seven percent of the Fund's projects have disseminated information about their activities and accomplishments (Pelavin, D., et al., 1980).

The Fund itself distributes information about its current projects in its annual publication Resources for Change. Over three thousand copies of the 1980 edition have been printed and distributed. The Fund's staff participate in the Annual Meetings of the American Educational Research Association and the American Association of Higher Education, always providing information about the activities of the Fund's projects. Discussions of project activities also annually occur during the review of preliminary proposals, when regional panels of field members are convened.

It appears that the activities and accomplishments of the Fund's projects are widely known within the field of postsecondary education.⁵ Thus the Fund's encouragement and emphasis on dissemination of information about its projects' activities can be hypothesized to be the cause of the Fund's projects affecting members of the field of postsecondary education other than their host institutions.

Continuation and Institutionalization

Almost 80 percent of the Fund's projects have continued to exist after the Fund's support had ended.⁶ Moreover, 70 percent of the Fund's projects have become institutionalized.⁷ We believe we now have sufficient knowledge to hypothesize about the causes of this high rate of institutionalization.

⁵NTS is currently investigating the extent of this knowledge as part of Phase II of its evaluation of the Fund.

⁶Percentages are based on 271 completed projects which had the potential for continuation after the Fund's support had ended. Fifty-one other completed projects were designed to accomplish a discrete task and then terminate.

⁷Criteria for institutionalization are contained in Pelavin, S., et al., op. cit.

Meeting Local Needs

The Fund seems to have avoided a major pitfall of other educational agencies: targeting money for specific, narrow objectives such as the implementation of a prepackaged curriculum. Instead the Fund has, through its broad objectives, established parameters within which members of the field of postsecondary education can develop projects to meet their own needs. Berman and McLaughlin (1977) recently studied four Federal programs that provide grants to local projects whose purposes are to improve various facets of elementary and secondary education. They found that projects were more likely to become institutionalized when the project's staff and participants felt that project activities were fulfilling local needs. The Fund's strategy requires that members of the host institution identify their own problems and create a plan which addresses those problems before they receive the Fund's support. This strategy provides strong local commitment to the projects.

A Strategy of Critical Intervention

The Fund uses a strategy of critical intervention; that is, it provides support at a time that is critical for project survival and success. This strategy frequently allows a relatively small financial contribution to have important significance. Moreover, the Fund's use of critical intervention requires that it only supports ideas or projects whose local development has already begun. Thus, the Fund generally avoids supporting "opportunistic" applicants or those applicants that are merely looking for an opportunity to obtain Federal money rather than attempting to fill local needs.

The critical intervention strategy also allows the Fund to use its grants to provide "moral support" to projects during periods of difficulty. The grant enables a project to continue by providing it with a sense of legitimacy which

can, in turn, be used to leverage other support both from within and outside of the host institution. In essence, the critical intervention strategy is used to provide a project with an extra push after which it can continue on its momentum.

The Fund's project at Miami-Dade Community College provides an example of the usefulness of the critical intervention strategy to project growth and continuation. An existing College program, "Life Lab" was in dire need of additional resources to develop an adequate support system to accommodate an ever increasing program participation rate. The Fund provided "Life Lab" with the necessary resources to develop such a system. Since the Fund's grant began, "Life Lab" has increased its enrollment from 80 to 600 students (approximately 5 percent of the student body of Miami-Dade Community College). Without the Fund's resources the support system would probably not have developed, and the program would not have been able to grow.

Early Planning

A final factor contributing to the Fund's success at project continuation and institutionalization is its emphasis on continuation even during a project's proposal stage. Berman and McLaughlin (1977) found that educational projects were more likely to become institutionalized when continuation strategies were considered early in the project's development. The Fund emphasizes that proposals should include a plan for the project becoming self-supporting or for obtaining support from the host institutions. The Fund also stresses not only that the host institutions may be asked to contribute some support to the project, but also that the proportion of support from the Fund will diminish if a project award extends beyond one year. Our evaluation found that the proposal selection process reflected these emphases.

The Fund's Success as a Federal Agency

We believe that the Fund's overall success as a Federal agency has been amply demonstrated. We also believe that the Fund may be useful as a model for other Federal programs or agencies which promote change. Although we have not as yet been able to scientifically investigate the causes of the Fund's success as a change agent, we have begun to construct hypotheses. Our major hypotheses concern the size of the Fund's staff, the Fund's responsiveness to the field and the Fund's strategy of critical intervention. By usual standards, the Fund is a small Federal agency with a small staff. Some hypothesize that it is this "smallness" and a conscious resistance to growth, both atypical qualities for a Federal agency, that are the Fund's secret of success. Others hypothesize that it is the Fund's receptivity to ideas generated within the field of post-secondary education itself that is the underlying cause of its success. Finally, some hypothesize that the Fund's success stems from its critical intervention strategy which enables projects whose ideas or activities have already begun to be developed to be most often awarded grants.

Each of the three hypotheses represent a unique characteristic of the Fund; characteristics which help set it apart from other Federal agencies. It may be that the Fund's overall success comes not from any one characteristic but from a combination of characteristics which make the Fund an atypical member of the Federal bureaucracy.

We are currently in the process of proposing additional research tasks to enable us to establish which of these hypotheses, if any, is correct. We feel that lessons learned from such a study of the causes of the Fund's success would be valuable to Congress and to the administration whenever a new Federal program or agency is planned or created and to all those who are concerned with change and improvement.

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Program Information and Application Procedures Fiscal Year 1978: The Comprehensive Program, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Education Division.

"A New Model for Federal Change Agent Programs", Sol H. Pelavin*

22.14/Table 4 (Individually Scheduled Papers Division G, and Division A), Thursday Morning, 8:45-9:30, Civic Center (Room 200, 3rd Floor).

"An Empirical Comparison of Four Indicators of Test Speededness", Nick Maruhnich*

Session: 23.12/Effects from Bias, Test-Wiseness, Speededness and Guessing (Critique, Division D), Thursday Morning, 10:35-12:05, Sheraton (Clarendon, 3rd Floor)

"Assessing and Improving the Accuracy of Title I Evaluation with Grade-Appropriate Tests", Edward Moran, West Virginia Department of Education; Robert F. Baker* and Nick Maruhnich*

Session: 23.13/Methods of Program Evaluation (Paper Presentation, Division D), Thursday Morning, 10:35-12:05, Sheraton (Dalton Room, 3rd Floor)

"Policy Implications Analysis", Michael Everett, Indiana University; A. Jackson Stenner*

Session: 23.20/Evaluation Potpourri (Critique, Division H), Thursday Morning, 10:45-12:05, Sheraton (Gardner, 3rd Floor)

"An Application of Psychometric Procedures in the Non-Psychological Domain: Development of Dissemination System Scales Using Classical Test Theory and Rasch Scaling Techniques", Robert F. Baker*, Jolinda K. Decad*, Doren L. Madey*, and A. Jackson Stenner*

Session: 24.19/Applications of Latent Trait Theory, Sequential Analysis and Multi Dimensional Scaling, (Paper Presentation, Division D), Thursday Afternoon, 12:35-1:55, Sheraton (Beacon F, 3rd Floor)

"Tuition Assistance and Income Neutrality in College Choice", William Shaut, State University of New York, Central Administration; Robert J. Goettel*

Session: 24.31/The Impact of Student Financial Aid on Postsecondary Education (Critique, SIG/Postsecondary Education), Thursday Afternoon, 12:25-1:55, Civic Center (Revere, 3rd Floor).

"Evaluating Title I Early Childhood Programs: Problems, the Applicability of Model C, and Several Evaluation Plans", Keith McNeil* and Emily A. Findlay*

Session: 26.05/Multiple Regression Analysis - Application and Interpretation (Symposium, SIG/Multiple Linear Regression), Thursday Afternoon, 4:05-6:05, Sheraton (Constitution, 2nd Floor)

Discussant: Judy McNeil*

*NTS Employees

"Development of Comprehensive State Dissemination Plans: An Overview of Present Status", Joseph F. Haenn*

"Developing Empirical Descriptions of Educational Linkage Agents", Doren L. Madey* and Robert F. Baker*

Session: 3.11/ Perspectives on Knowledge Utilization at the System, Organizational and Individual Levels (Critique, SIG/Research Utilization), Monday Afternoon, 4:05-5:35, Sheraton (Exeter, 3rd Floor).

"State Grants for Capacity Building in Dissemination", Eugene C. Royster*

Session: 5.18/Relating Research to Policy on Dissemination Symposium, Division A), Tuesday Morning, 8:15-10:15, Sheraton (Beacon G, 3rd Floor).

"Effects of Magnet School Enrollment Changes on Desegregation", John C. Larson, Montgomery County Schools; Eugene C. Royster*

Session: 6.10/Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Desegregation (Paper Presentation, Division G), Tuesday Morning, 8:45-10:15, Civic Center (Room 202, 3rd Floor).

"The Distributions of NCE, Percentile and Grade Equivalent Scores Among Twelve Nationally Standardized Achievement Tests", Thomas B. Williams*

Session: 6.12/Achievement Testing: Methodological Issues (Critique, Division H), Tuesday Morning, 8:45-10:15, Civic Center (Revere, 3rd Floor).

"History and Development of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education", Jan Shefter*, Diane Pelavin*, and Martin Orland*

"An Analysis of the Fund's Comprehensive Grant Program", Becky Jon Hayward*, Dan Johnston* and Diane Pelavin*

"An Analysis of the Achievements and Impacts of the Fund's Projects", Diane Pelavin*, Dan Johnston* and Jan Shefter*

"An Analysis of the Fund's Management Strategy", Martin Orland*, Becky Jon Hayward* and Jan Shefter*

"Hypotheses About the Successes of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education", Sol H. Pelavin*, Martin Orland* and Becky Jon Hayward*

Session: 17.22/A Study of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (Symposium, SIG/Postsecondary Education), Wednesday Afternoon, 2:15-3:45, Sheraton (Beacon F, 3rd Floor).

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"Reasons Why Testing and Evaluations Don't Inform", Joseph F. Haenn*

Session: 28.19/SEA and LEA Strategies to Use Testing and Evaluation Information for Local School Improvement (Symposium, Division H), Friday Morning, 8:15-10:15, Sheraton (Constitution, 2nd Floor)

Critic: Robert J. Goettel*

"The Regression Route to Reliability Coefficients", Bob Burton, Applied Management Sciences; A. Jackson Stenner*

Session: 30.13/Test Reliability (Critique, Division D), Friday Morning, 10:35-12:05, Sheraton (Clarendon, 3rd Floor)

"What is Educational Significance?", Michael B. Bunch*

Session: 30.20/Evaluation Research: Impact on Policy (Critique, Division H), Friday Morning, 10:35-12:05, Sheraton (Gardner, 3rd Floor)

"Toward a Conceptual Framework for Understanding State and Local Implementation of Federal Aid Programs in Education", Martin E. Orland* and Robert J. Goettel*

Session: 30.22/Implementing Organizational Change (Paper Presentation, Division A), Friday Morning, 10:35-12:05, Sheraton (Beacon G, 3rd Floor)

"Test Item Development: An Empirical Study of Practical Problems", Nick Maruhnich* and Thomas Dunning*

Session: 32.09/Issues in Test Construction and Interpretation (Paper Presentation, Division D), Friday Afternoon, 2:15-3:45, Sheraton (Clarendon, 3rd Floor)

"Identification of Oral Communication Skills in Children and an Analysis of Developmental Differences in Performance", Jolinda K. Decad*

Session: 32.18/Oral Reading and Oral Communication in Children (Critique, Division C), Friday Afternoon, 2:15-3:45, Civic Center (Hancock, 3rd Floor)

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Below is a brief listing of some recent and continuing NTS contracts:

- Educational Policy Development Center for Educational Quality and Improvement.
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Education/Policy Development.
- Evaluation of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education.
Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
- Evaluation of State Dissemination Grants Program for Capacity Building.
National Institute of Education.
- Evaluation of Urban Area Experience-Based Career Education Program.
Office of Career Education, US Office of Education.
- Follow-Up Study of Patients Who Had I-131 and Other Diagnostic Procedures During Childhood.
DHEW/FDA Bureau of Radiological Health.
- National Evaluation of Headstart Educational Services.
Administration for Children, Youth and Families.
- Operation of the ESEA Title I Technical Assistance Center, HEW Region III.
Office of Evaluation and Dissemination, US Office of Education.
- Delaware Item Pool Development.
Delaware State Department of Public Instruction.
- Evaluation of the Comprehensive Project in Adult Functional Literacy Education.
North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges.
- ESEA Title I Evaluation: District of Columbia.
District of Columbia Public Schools.
- Educational Policy Development Center for Educational Quality and Improvement.
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Education/Policy Development.